

Sermon

“Whoever says, “I abide in him,” ought to walk just as he walked.

The saying about getting to understand someone by walking a mile in their shoes is one of those sayings that I appreciate more and more, the older I get, and one that I sometimes use as a touchstone if I am feeling all at sea in a situation, when I realise that I need to pause and consider a situation from the other persons point of view and experience.

At the beginning of our service we shared “More than an invitation...”

I wonder what those words meant for you.

I wonder how they made you feel.

We could almost view that exchange as a journey, a walk taken step by step, towards a clearer understanding of what it is like for someone from a black and ethnic minority background, or as it is referred to in short form from the BAME community. How easy it is for some of us to say you are welcome but not really to appreciate just how high the threshold is, just what obstacles and abuse have to be negotiated before BAME people can truly feel they are not just welcomed but that they belong, no longer an outsider.

What will it take before we can all conclude?

Whoever belongs to God, belongs among us, for we are one in Christ.

For sadly church communities and, equally, church hierarchies fall short of complete inclusivity.

In our reading from John’s first letter, John says “Beloved I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you have had from the beginning.” The new part of the commandment is that Jesus has come, come to live with us fully human and sharing our lives. Jesus has come

to show us how to walk in his light.

The whole thrust of John’s letter is to encourage those new Christians to live in fellowship with God and with Jesus and to warn them against false teaching. His emphasis was that all who believe in Jesus and love God must also love one another.

In our gospel reading we have this delightful telling of Jesus parable of the unjust judge. Luke is brilliant at bringing characters to life and is quite cheeky

as he makes the one we are to characterise as God into a mixed character who does the right thing for the wrong reason. The first priority in Jewish law was justice for the orphan and widow, so this is an open and shut case, not one to ignore. The overall message to those who read this gospel when it was first written, the early gentile Christians undergoing persecution, and for us today, is to persevere in prayer.

For those who are oppressed and suffering injustice in the BAME communities their prayers seem to go unanswered. During lockdown, as if things were not dreadful enough, we heard the news from America of George Floyd's murder at the hands of a police officer, watched by his colleagues. The cry that Black Lives Matter was heard as many took to the streets to protest. We must ask ourselves how will these heartfelt prayers and protests be answered. How long before we can say together:

Whoever belongs to God, belongs among us, for we are one in Christ.

In the wider church Covid 19 and the events around the world including Black Lives Matter and Climate Justice has received much thought and prayer. Pope Francis signed a new encyclical on St Francis Day, last Sunday, in it he outlines his attempts to show that a better way is possible.

“Our love for others, for who they are, moves us to seek the best for their lives. Only by cultivating this way of relating to one another will we make possible a social friendship that excludes no one and a fraternity [or a fellowship] that is open to all.

As a church here in Colliers wood, we are members of the Inclusive Church network because we believe that to take Jesus command to love our neighbour as ourselves to heart means that we have to embody that love for all of our neighbours. This isn't a fluffy love, similar to the welcome that doesn't truly include,

the love of Christ, which we try to show, has to be honest and face the reality that we are as yet far from walking as Christ did

and we cannot find that path unless we reorientate ourselves – turn around, repent, ask forgiveness and begin to walk together in a new direction. So that we can at last say:

Whoever belongs to God, belongs among us, for we are one in Christ. Amen.